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1959/11/24

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FROM WASHINGTON TO FOREIGN OFFICE

Cypher/OTP

P R I S E C

Sir H. Caccia

No. 2455

November 24, 1959

D. 7.06 p.m. November 24, 1959

R. 7.53 p.m. November 24, 1959

IMMEDIATE

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Following personal for the Secretary of State from the Ambassador.

Your telegram No. 5034: Cuba.

I had to see Allen Dulles this morning on another matter and took the opportunity to discuss Cuba on a strictly personal basis.

2. In reply to my question how long he thought Castro was likely to last, Mr. Dulles said that, if he had to guess, he would say something in the range of eight months. He thought that the next three or four months were going to be the testing time and, if Castro survived them successfully, he might even carry on for a number of years. Consequently he would far rather delay an answer to my question.

3. He then volunteered that there was at present in Cuba no opposition to Castro who were capable of action. Abroad there were a number of Batista adherents who were trying to get into touch with the United States Administration, but they were, of course, worthless. The most hopeful prospect might lie amongst people who had originally been supporters of Castro and had only recently become alienated. He gave as instances Matos and the Chief of the Air Staff. If Castro continued on his present course, something might be made of an opposition consisting of such elements outside, and inside, Cuba. But the time for that had not yet come, though for our most confidential information, he was already making some contact with these people for possible future use.

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4. From his own point of view, he said that he greatly hoped that we would decide not to go ahead with the Hunter deal. His main reason was that this might lead the Cubans to ask for Soviet or Soviet bloc arms. He had not cleared this with the State Department, but it was, of course, a fact that in the case of Guatemala it had been the shipment of Soviet arms that had brought the opposition elements together and created the occasion for what was done. The same might be true in the case of Cuba, and the presence, for instance, of MIGs would have a tremendous effect, not only in the United States, but with other Latin-American countries, quite apart from Trujillo.

5. Summing up, he said that there was, of course, always the chance that Castro would get shot. If this did not happen, it was not impossible that within three or four months civil government might just break down. He himself was sceptical whether things would develop in this way to the point which would lead to Castro's downfall. He had heard that the crop had been quite good this year and in these primitive countries where the sun shone, the demands of the people were far less than in more advanced societies. After, say, four months he would hope to be in a position to give a better estimate of Castro's longer term prospects.

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6. Meanwhile, he repeated that if, and only if, he had to give an off-the-cuff estimate today, he would plump for something in the order of eight to nine months. But that would not, (repeat not) be for quotation and on this personal basis he again said that he hoped that any refusal by us to supply arms would directly lead to a Soviet bloc offer to supply. Then he might be able to do something; for he was convinced that Castro was not only a bad man but had a streak of lunacy in his make-up which might have incalculable results. In other words, he was more like a Cuban Hitler than a Cuban version of Peron.

7. I did, in fact, repeat to Mr. Hankey what I had said in my telegram No. 2334, namely, that in my view, a decision to go ahead would not do deep or lasting damage here. This particularly if the news of our decision broke through a balanced statement of our own rather than a Press leak based upon a Cuban version. But in the three weeks which have elapsed since my telegram, and during the longer period of your personal exchanges with Mr. Herter, the situation in Cuba appears to have deteriorated, and attacks on the United States to have sharpened. At any rate, public opinion in the United States has continued to harden under the insults of Castro. So far as we are concerned, there could, therefore, be no doubt that a decision on the lines set down in paragraph 5 of your telegram would come as a great relief to the United States Administration and public.

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